

Small Business

I know that small businesses are the lifeblood of our communities. When I was young, my mother owned a bridal store, and together my parents owned and ran an ice cream and sandwich shop. This was on top of their other jobs, community work, and, of course, taking care of our family. I watched my folks put the family savings and all their efforts on the line to make a go of it during tough economic times. I also saw firsthand their struggle with financing, paperwork and regulations, employee issues, and the challenge of finding affordable health care.

While small businesses have created the most net new jobs in the U.S. economy during the last decade, too many businesses have been forced to close due to rising costs, increased regulations, and a tax system that penalizes expanding enterprises. This isn't right and I've worked in Congress to create a more small business friendly attitude. Supporting small businesses should not be a partisan issue, it should be something we all agree on and work together to achieve.

A Skilled Workforce

There is a growing demand for skilled workers in America. Career and technical education programs address this need by focusing education and job training skills in those areas with the greatest need. In fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Standards' projections, 8 of out of the top 10 occupations with the largest job growth through 2014 will require an associate's degree or career and technical training. In preparing for a well-educated and skilled workforce in America, career and technical education is crucial in providing youth and adults with the skills they need in a competitive global economy.

Career and Technical Education provides opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant, real world situations. It helps students acquire the employability and leadership skills that will enable them to succeed both in the workplace and in higher education. In recognition of this, Congressman Baird founded the Congressional Career and Technical Education Caucus. This Caucus works to increase awareness of the importance of career and technical education in Congress, supports funding and resources, and promotes legislation that benefits career and technical education.

We must also increase the quality of our math and science education. Our students must be provided with well-trained math and science teachers and state-of-the-art curriculums to keep pace with today's job markets. As the chairman of the Research and Science Education Subcommittee, a member of the House Science Committee, Congressman

Baird believes we must improve the performance of our young people in science, technology, and mathematical fields.

In 2007, Congressman Baird helped author the America COMPETES Act. This landmark, bipartisan legislation makes substantial improvements to math and science education, including establishing a program at the National Science Foundation to create more qualified teachers in science and math fields, and strengthened the nation's commitment to scientific research. The America COMPETES Act, which was celebrated by educators and businesses, was signed into law in August of 2007.

Finally, the United States is also facing a language gap that has the potential to damage our global economic competitiveness. Economically, we must be prepared to tap into emerging global markets like China and India. While millions of Americans study foreign languages, the overwhelming majority of class enrollment is in Spanish, French, or German. Unfortunately, that enrollment balance does not reflect the economic realities of the 21st century.

Congressman Baird believes we must ensure that our children and grandchildren have the tools that they need to remain competitive in the future global economy. The ability to speak the languages of emerging economies will help U.S. businesses and protect American jobs.

Responding to this need, Congressman Baird has introduced the National Foreign Language Coordination Act. This legislation would establish a National Language Director and create a National Foreign Language Coordination Council to develop and oversee the implementation of an American foreign language strategy, including strengthening foreign language education programs and standards.

Congressman Baird has also introduced the Access to Language Education Act. This legislation would create a federally-sponsored video programming channel on the Internet focused on providing foreign language instruction. Instruction would be provided for languages that are not widely taught in educational institutions in the U.S., but that are likely to have significant value for our country in global competitiveness, trade, international relations, national security, and defense.

Capital for Small Businesses

Access to affordable financing and capital is one of the chief obstacles preventing small business growth. Congressman Baird is a champion of the Business Retained Income During Growth and Expansion (BRIDGE) Act. The BRIDGE Act allows fast-growing small and mid-sized businesses to defer a portion of their federal income tax liability for two years in order to invest the money in the growth of their businesses. When implemented, this proposal may create over 900,000 new jobs in three years. It will also generate new revenue for the federal government when the deferred taxes are gradually paid back with interest by the businesses.

As a former member of the Small Business Committee, Congressman Baird also knows how important the 7(a) small business loan program is to our nation's economy. One of the most important components to economic recovery is to provide small businesses with an infusion of capital. Unfortunately, many conventional forms of capital are often out of reach for small business. As a result, the number one method for financing a business is credit cards, which usually carry very high interest rates. Filling this financing vacuum are the Small Business Administration (SBA) loan programs. Through public-private partnerships, small businesses are able to tap into capital that is both affordable and accessible.

Paperwork Reduction

Small business owners are drowning in mountains of paperwork that distract them from running their business and helping our economy grow. They need relief from payroll and tax regulations that are difficult to understand and monitor. To help ease the burden placed on our small businesses, Congressman Baird voted for the Paperwork Relief Act, which was signed into law, creating an interagency task force focused on streamlining and consolidating small business paperwork requirements. Now, small business owners have greater access to agency officials to help them navigate through and reduce the amount of paperwork they must complete, allowing them to focus on running their business.

Health Care

Many small businesses cite rising health care costs as one of their most significant concerns. Congressman Baird believes we must comprehensively reform the health care system in order to lower skyrocketing costs and expand coverage to the nearly 47.46 million Americans who are currently uninsured.

To achieve these goals, Congressman Baird has introduced bipartisan legislation called the Healthy Americans Act. The Healthy Americans Act is a comprehensive health care proposal. The proposal maintains consumer choice and guarantees private health care coverage that cannot be taken away and is at least as good as that offered to Members of Congress and Senators.

The Healthy Americans Act guarantees private health insurance for all Americans by:

- Ensuring that every American has a high-quality, private health care plan that is comparable to what Members of Congress now enjoy.
- Establishing a sliding scale of health care premium assistance for low-income Americans.

- Creating a health care tax credit to help Americans cover the cost of their health care plan.
- Requiring every American to purchase a private health care plan.

The Healthy Americans Act eliminates the link between employment and health care by:

- Ending the employer health care tax deduction and replacing it with a personal tax credit.
- Requiring employers who currently provide employee health benefits to convert their health care premiums into higher wages that employees will use to purchase their own private health insurance for the first four years.
- Requiring employers to make payments to the federal government, on a sliding scale depending on the number of employees, to fund premium subsidies. Employers who do not currently provide health benefits will be required to begin making phased-in payments immediately; after four years, all employers will be making these payments.

The Healthy Americans Act protects consumers by:

- Prohibiting discrimination against beneficiaries based on health status or genetics.
- Allowing plans to use financial incentives to reward beneficiaries who enroll in wellness programs or otherwise pursue a healthy lifestyle.
- Establishing a Health Help Agency in each state to coordinate payments from employers, individuals and government; coordinate enrollment of individuals in private health care plans; and provide consumers with unbiased information about competing health care plans.
- Requiring insurers to use standardized common forms to make health care more transparent for consumers.
- Providing additional research and education efforts on the comparative effectiveness of health care items to ensure that consumers receive effective, quality care.
- Allowing beneficiaries to purchase additional coverage above and beyond the federal standard if they choose.
- Maintaining employer-based retiree health plan for individuals who are already retired and Medicare, and preserving health plans negotiated as part of a collective bargaining agreement for as long as nine years.

The Healthy Americans Act reallocates federal resources by:

- Phasing out the Disproportionate Share Hospital payments program, which provides compensation to hospitals treating the uninsured. Universal coverage will obviate the need for this program.
- Phasing out the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) in favor of coverage under the Healthy Americans Act.
- Ending non-supplemental Medicaid and providing basic health care for low income Americans.

According to a comprehensive review and score by the nonpartisan Lewin Group, the Healthy Americans Act will increase coverage and decrease costs by:

- Providing health care coverage to 99% of Americans
- Phasing out the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) in favor of coverage under the Healthy Americans Act.
- Cutting national spending on health care, both public and private, and creating a long term savings of \$1.48 trillion over the next ten years.

Some business owners have expressed support for Small Business Health Plans, which allow businesses to join together to provide coverage to their employees. By banding together to purchase insurance, businesses and employers share the costs and reduce the individual financial burden that can keep companies from offering coverage to workers.

While Congressman Baird initially had reservations about Small Business Health Plans, he met repeatedly with local business leaders to learn more about the obstacles they encounter and the benefits of cost-sharing associated with these health plans. Although there is certainly room for further improvements in the area of solvency and viability of the insurers and protections for mental health and other benefits, Congressman Baird believes that - in the end - it is far better for employees and businesses to have insurance they can afford and has voted in support of Small Business Health Plans.

Congressman Baird also recognizes that the problem of rising medical liability insurance costs is complex. Many have come to believe that the current situation is undermining our health care system, demoralizing health care professionals, costing billions of dollars per year, failing to substantially reduce medical errors, and still leaving many patients with legitimate claims unsupported. Faced with these concerns, Congressman Baird acknowledges that common sense, balanced reform is both essential and imminent, and that reform should constrain the cost of medical liability insurance and reduce unwarranted litigation, protect the rights of patients who have been harmed to received compensation, and improve the quality of health care in this country.

Congressman Baird introduced the Comprehensive Medical Malpractice Reform Act. The legislation: :

- Regulates and reforms the medical malpractice insurance industry;
- Provides alternatives to litigation through the promotion of successful mediation practices;
- Improves the quality of health care in this country;
- Reduces frivolous lawsuits and sets reasonable limits on non-economic damages; and,
- Excludes medical devices and pharmaceuticals from the cap on non-economic damages.

Congressman Baird believes this approach is likely to improve patient care, reduce medical errors, lower the costs of litigation, and still provide avenues for patients who have been harmed to receive compensation and support. He is strongly committed to a bipartisan and practical approach to medical malpractice reform, taking into consideration the views and concerns of all persons affected by the outcome. He will continue to work with his colleagues in Congress and with the Administration to achieve this common goal.

Streamlining the Environmental Permitting Process

Protecting the environment is always a priority, but regulatory processing and permitting have become unnecessarily costly and time consuming. In recent years, Congressman Baird has organized a series of meetings throughout Southwest Washington to bring local business leaders, farmers, builders, ports and others together with federal, state and local officials to improve the permitting process. As a direct result, several federal and state agencies have made significant progress in streamlining permits, reducing application backlogs and complexity, and improving coordination to expedite the process. There is still work to be done, and much room for improvement and Congressman Baird will continue to work with the consumers of permits and agency representatives to push for further improvements in efficiency and savings in time and money.

Estate Tax Reform

Congressman Baird believes that the estate tax needs to be reformed. He has cosponsored legislation and voted to permanently reform the estate tax by immediately exempting up to \$10 million dollars in assets from any tax at death. This reform will protect more than 99 percent of family-owned businesses, forests, and farms from paying any estate taxes. He believes this is a common sense compromise that would benefit local, family-owned businesses and farms.

Congressman Baird will continue to advocate for legislation to reform the estate tax and reduce the tax burden on family owned businesses and farms. He has also supported measures that allow family-owned

businesses and farms to pass all their tangible business or farm assets on to family members tax free, as long as the business or farm stays in the family's hands. These fair and common sense changes will help local, family businesses stay local and family-owned and keep our communities stronger.

United
States Small Business Administration

Washington
State Office of Trade and Economic Development - Small Business
Resources

House
Small Business Committee

Senate
Small Business Committee

How
to Get a Business License in Washington

Job/employee
search from Work Source Washington

Washington
Small Business Development Centers

Better
Business Bureau